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ABSTRACT

The concept of ideological thinking should be introduced to secondary students. The need to attend to ideology has been the concern of many social studies educators. Suzanne Helburn stresses the need for the social studies to focus on powerful organizing ideas, of which the concept of ideology itself is one of the most powerful. Maxine Greene and William Proefriedt urge greater attention to the matter of ideology in teacher education. Teachers should be taught to avoid indoctrination and to encourage students to think critically about important value issues. During the 1960's and 1970's there was reform in the social studies curricula, related, for example, to sexism and minority rights. The major area of reform yet to be addressed is economic discrimination. The discussion of the nature and function of ideological thinking would be an important way to approach this topic. A model recommended by David Armstrong in his "Social Studies in Secondary Education," which involves students in analyzing political decision making in their own school and in identifying the nature and function of values held by their peers and elders, may be a way to introduce students to ideological thinking. (RM)

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TOO SOON TO TALK ABOUT IDEOLOGY IN SOCIAL STUDIES?

Suzanne Helburn, in her article, "The Social Studies Curriculum: Status and Potentials for Reform," draws a bleak picture of the possibilities for the reforms she thinks are most urgent. "It is important- crucial- and possible to introduce students to powerful organizing ideas and to help them to see interrelationships, the historical development of social problems, and their connection to the economic and political systems... Because of its ideological function in the overall school experience, traditional social studies content obfuscates and mystifies, treats our ideals as real, attainable goals which have not yet been reached, when in reality they cannot be reached in a world dominated by capital accumulation and increasing concentration of power.(1) Her concern is to focus on "powerful organizing ideas", of which the

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concept of ideology itself is one of the most powerful, and to stress the importance of addressing such ideas in the social studies curriculum.

Maxine Greene also has referred to the need to attend to the issue of ideology, especially in teacher preparation. In her article "The Matter of Mystification: Teacher Education in Unquiet Times", she speaks of developing a "new democratic pedagogy" and says, "whatever efforts can be made to enable teachers-to-be to speak for themselves and confront the concreteness of their lives ought to play into the critique that challenges mystification. And in time this might be carried into the classrooms of the schools or wherever such persons finally work." (2) She stresses the damage done to teachers and students by their unconsciousness of ideology, which she calls "mystification," and urges for greater attention to the matter of ideology in the "foundations" area of teacher education.

William Proefriedt in "Socialist Criticisms of Education in the United States: Problems and Possibilities" recommends a similar effort. In explaining why socialist critique of education has had so little impact on teachers of Social Studies, he concludes that too much attention was paid to locating the source of educational change outside the schools, and too little to a practical course of action for teachers to pursue within the schools to express their

committment to a new social order. Describing the position which he calls an "interactionist" perspective, he says, "Teaching that emphasizes the development of critical thinking implies a two way exchange between the schools and the larger environment, one in which the individual does not merely adjust to societal forms but actively reworks those forms for his or her own benefit and for the benefit of all." (3) He notes "the Deweyan concern with critical thinking needs to be incorporated into a philosophy of teaching that addresses itself to the question: how can teachers avoid a subtle indoctrination of their students into the present values of our society as they go about encouraging them to think critically about important value issues." Echoing Maxine Greene's interest in "a new pedagogy", he says, "the concept of ideology, so richly explored by Marxist thinkers for more than a century, could serve as an important building block in a new theory and practice of teaching." (4)

Those who have contributed to the numerous reviews of the evaluation of social studies programs in the seventies (cf. Hertzberg, 1981) seem to agree on the declining interest in social studies, but have little to say about alternatives to deal with the problem. Hertzberg's gesture in this direction is to quote Gross: "Gross saw two possible futures. One included 'a steadily declining curricular field, diffused and

balkanized, often turning backwards and up panacea alleys, increasingly delimited because of its own lack of purpose and direction and by the failure to agree upon a core of socio-civic learnings.' The other promised 'renewed and unified efforts at convincingly defining the fundamental contributions of the field toward helping meet individual and social needs.'"(5)

It is apparent, however, that the same period of innovation in the 1960-1970s has seen the inclusion in social studies curricula of several areas of reform: civil rights, especially in the area of racism, sexism, ageism, and minority rights. The major area of reform yet to be addressed is economic discrimination, a subject directly related to the ideological function of schooling. The discussion of the nature and function of ideological thinking in the social studies curriculum would be an important way to approach this topic. While the reports suggest that it has been difficult if not futile to try to raise this issue in the social studies curriculum so far, the writers noted above indicate that it is important to find a way for it to be done.

David Strong in his Social Studies in Secondary Education says that despite the research by Cleary (6), which indicated that students arrive at junior high school with political attitudes already established, and that peers and community rather than school influence their political views most strongly, nevertheless, "These limitations do not suggest that

nothing can be done." (7) He goes on to outline "Considerations for Responsible Political Education."

He presents a model based on Cleary that involves student analysis of political decision making in their own school, and identification of the nature and function of values held by their peers and elders.

This program, in my view, offers an entrance in social studies programs at secondary level for the long-overdue consideration of ideological questions in American culture. It raises issues of the nature of democratic ideals, and of the social and political realities to which they are applied. It allows questions of a critical nature to be raised about basic values such as freedom and justice, and the relation of schooling and labor to these values.

This recommendation by Armstrong may be a way to introduce the concept of ideological thinking to students at the secondary level. If so, it may show that the 1980s will not be too soon to talk about ideology in social studies.

Endnotes

1. "The Social Studies Curriculum: Status and Potentials for Reform," Teaching Political Science, Vol. 8, No. 3, April 1981, p.357,360.

2. Landscapes of Learning, (New York:Teachers College Press, 1978), p.70.

3. Harvard Educational Review, Vol.50, No. 4, November 1980, p. 476.

4. Ibid., p.477.

5. Hazel Whitman Hertzberg, Social Studies Reform 1880-1980, p. 157.

6. Robert E. Cleary, Political Education in the American Democracy, Scranton, Pennsylvania: Intext Educational Publishers, 1971.

7. Armstrong, p. 379.

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